

Testimony for HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination

Submitted by: Jamiah Tappin

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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Jamiah Tappin and I am a resident of East Hartford and a graduate student at the UCONN School of Social Work. I am here to voice my support for HB 6599: *An Act Concerning Discrimination*.

My decision to testify today is not only as an ally, but as a Black woman, who represents the legacy of a struggle for equality and acceptance, not too far from the one transgender, transsexual, and gender non-conforming people are fighting today.

Although racism towards African Americans in this country can be seen as a unique form of discrimination, in my opinion, the feeling of being stigmatized based on physical appearances and stereotypes are similar. I know what it is like to walk into a room and hear people whispering about me, to be stared at and have little children point at me and say "Mommy, why does she look like that?" I know what it is like to not feel worthy or valued as an individual, but judged by something I cannot change. Fortunately, I also know what it is like to have protection under the law when I am discriminated against in the areas of housing, healthcare, and employment for my race or gender. I know that I can walk on this earth and stay true to myself.

My friendships and dialogues with transgender people, have given me the opportunity to broaden my life experience. I can only imagine the personal struggle they have had to endure and then, in the end, be denied the rights that should be inherent to all. How can we live in a society that encourages self-determination, yet punishes you for being "different?" Our laws should protect every one of us. Are transgender people not living, breathing beings? Do they not deserve respect and dignity by having the same safeguards as every other citizen in this state?

As a social worker it is my duty to ensure that all people have equal access to resources, employment, and services, but as a human being it is my honor to testify today and stand alongside transgender people in their fight for equality. I urge you to support HB 6599 and protect the basic human rights of all people by including gender identity and expression in Connecticut's non-discrimination laws. Thank you for your time.